

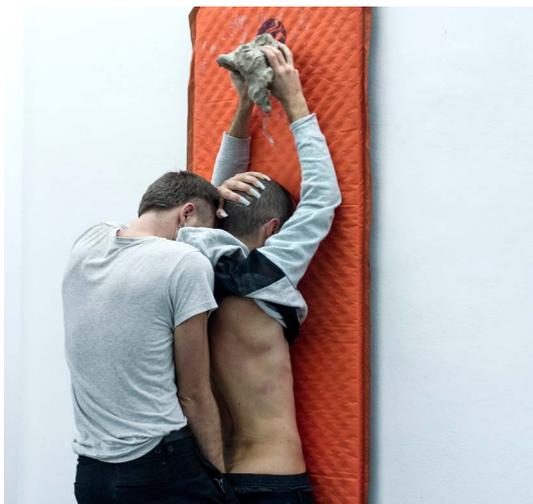
On Pleasure Sculpting

by Amelie Wedel

Performer A gives pleasure to performer B. Performer B, holding a block of clay, moulds his or her bodily sensations directly into the wet bulk. The clay is then dried, fired and glazed, solidifying the sensations into the sculpture to be exhibited.

Quite straight forward, the research project *Pleasure Sculpting* by Julian Weber is about using pleasure as a technology to produce sculptures. The whole process of production is choreographed: positions, actions and performers are predetermined. And although *Pleasure Sculpting* involves performances, the aim is not to perform pleasure as it is about the immediacy of inscribing whatever is felt in that very moment into the raw material.

Performer B drooling on sculpture.



SCULPTURE

I look at the pleasure sculptures composed of weight, cracks, folds, twists and holes. They make me think of temperature, pressure, licking, pulsation, tension, swelling. In fact, it is impossible for me to distinguish between what is there and what is imagined. Such is the structure of the trace; inscribed in the physical world, as evidence of a past, mobilizing speculation about preceding actions. This is precisely what the sculptures



offer: to read them backwards. It is in this way, that they reveal something about the impulses involved in their emergence, they say something about the situation they were produced in, they contain time and space, they are embodied mediators, an archive of touch. Following the solid inscriptions back to their movement makes these landscapes of grips strangely lively.

Performer A standing against the wall, holding a block of clay. Performer B licking performer A.

In previous versions of Julian Weber's yearlong research project *Pleasure Sculpting* – realized as workshops and performances – the use of clay has been inseparable from the performative act. As in some of his earlier works, the whole apparatus of spray bottles and water basins had to be sustained, for keeping the clay wet and malleable th-



roughout the performance. As soon as it was over the clay dried and got discarded. Now, the focus shifts for the first time, and the performance leftovers are taken through the whole process of crafting durable ceramics. These solidified forms have become valuable in their own right, asking for a new form of display, hence the exhibition. It is this particular materiality of clay that in one state is malleable and in another state is rigid that allows for matter to remain performative in one instance and for matter to become sculpture in another.

The display of the pleasure sculptures in the exhibition, positioned on a horizontal plane with a number of flat screens and bottles of green, purple, blue fluids, beautifully softens the hard edges between what is touchable and what is untouchable. These sculptures seem to be prolonged movements like a suspended dance – a long lasting plié. What is the material of touch, I wonder. And above all, how do these bodies settle within flatness?

Performer A pouring fluids on sculpture.

PLEASURE

„Pleasure acts‘ are erotic, sensual, intimate, but also „Hand-Werk“, *techné*, technology. Although the performance is clearly staged intimacy, it is not about representing pleasure, but about creating a space in which pleasure might happen or not. And yet, *Pleasure*



Sculpting, contrasted by the formality of production, is equally about simply generating sculpture. By this, pleasure becomes a form-giving technology when understood as a means by which to produce a stimulus, to activate a physical signal to set forth movement that brings about form. *Pleasure Sculpting* is like a multistable image that you can look at and read it in two different ways: as intimacy but also instrumentalisation, as pleasure but also production.

Here, in a collaborative act, all human and nonhuman beings constituting this triadic relation of pleasing body, pleased body, and clay body are involved in the co-production of form. Like a chain reaction, they together form the sculpture since one performer ‚sculpts‘ the body of the other performer, who in turn translates those stimulations into the clay. And then, during the opening performance, it all got twisted once more, when not only human bodies are receivers of pleasure acts but clay bodies as well, proposing to extend the capability of receiving pleasure to inorganic matter.

Performer B giving pleasure to sculpture.

PLASTICITY

I am wondering what happens to the interaction between the three bodies if we bring them in contact with the concept of plasticity. Can concepts mould bodies? And the other way around, are abstractions malleable?

Plasticity means adaptability or malleability; an object is plastic if it can be formed and moulded. But it can also mean bodily; for instance, language is plastic if it has a spatial quality to it. French philosopher Catherine Malabou, however, has a very particular understanding of plasticity. She says, it exists of folds = French, *plié*, which means to bend, to double up, but also to give in under pressure, to obey. According to her, there are folds that generate change, that are fluid and creative and there are folds that are trapped in repetition, that are permanent and resistant to change. For her, every thing is subject to a double fold, always positioned between fluidity and rigidity, between yielding and resisting. She writes: „Plasticity, as we know, designates the capacity to concurrently receive and bestow form. Thus one who creates – the artist, for instance – is simulateaneously created anew by their work.“

I am thinking about all the bodies involved in *Pleasure Sculpting* as being plastic bodies. To think with Malabou would mean then, that they all, organic and inorganic alike, form each other while being formed. It is a reciprocal act, by all means, in which all actors involved – performer A, performer B, clay and viewer – are transformed in the process of pleasure sculpting – whether it be as participant or witness.

Performer A eating pizza.



This text has been written alongside conversations with Julian Weber and reading Marie-Luise Angerer, Karen Barad, Catherine Malabou.

Images: Julian Weber, *A Long Lasting Plié*, Opening at Grimmuseum, 2019. Foto credit: Rocio Marano